

AREA / WORLD

Bill would require state to rewrite wolf plan

Rep. Debby Barrett proposing 24-hour phone line with pack locations

By NICK GEVOCK
of The Montana Standard

DILLON — A Beaverhead County lawmaker said she will push a bill this legislative session that would require state wildlife officials to notify counties and residents the location of wolf packs and setup a 24-hour phone line where people could call to learn where wolves are.

Rep. Debby Barrett, R-Grant, is also proposing to require biologists with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to rewrite the state's wolf management plan. That's needed because the plan has several false premises about wolf behavior, Barrett said.

"There are some incorrect assumptions in it: that wolves don't kill livestock, that wolves will only hunt in packs, that wolves will only kill what

they eat," she said. "We know now that there are some false premises in that plan and we just want to base it on current and correct data."

Barrett's bill would also require that any federal funding for wolf management in excess of \$600,000 a year be spent to compensate landowners for wildlife killed by wolves. The measure would also allow biologists to kill an entire pack of wolves when one member starts attacking wildlife, instead of the incremental approach that officials have been using.

Barrett said the changes are necessary to deal with the ever-increasing wolf population.

"The agencies need to do what they need to do to protect livestock and human life," she said.

Chris Smith, chief of staff for FWP director Jeff Hagener, said the agency hasn't taken a position on the bill as of yet. But he added that FWP is already implementing most of the provisions of the bill are already taking place.

For example, FWP posts on its Web site the known locations of wolf packs after monitoring flights. And wildlife

managers already have the flexibility to eliminate an entire pack when wolves get into trouble and have done so, he said.

Officials use an "incremental" approach to deal with problem wolves that calls for trying to kill the individuals that are attacking livestock, but that's not a requirement, Smith said.

"I don't think there's anything that would prevent us from removing an entire pack if we decided it was warranted," he said.

He said although he doesn't know of problems with the state's wolf management plan, officials would review it.

"We regularly evaluate assumptions on a routine basis," Smith said.

Smith said a separate bill proposed for the Legislature this session would set up a compensation fund for ranchers. But he said that money should be separate from funding for management of wolves.

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